Beowulf Activity Packet

Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon epic poem, the most important work of Old English literature and one of the earliest existing poems in modern times. The only surviving manuscript was discovered in the 17th century by the English antiquarian, Sir Robert Cotton (1571–1631). It has been preserved since 1753 in the Codex Vittelius AXV in the British Museum.

The somber story is told in vigorous, picturesque language, with much use of metaphor. It tells of a hero, a Scandinavian prince named Beowulf, who rids the Danes of the monster Grendel, half man and half fiend. Fifty years later, Beowulf succeeds in repeating these exploits, freeing his own land from devastation.

Beowulf has been published and translated into modern English frequently since 1833, sometimes in poetry, sometimes in prose. The verse translation by the Irish poet and Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney published in 2000 was recognized as the book of the year when awarded the England's prestigious Whitbread Prize.

Pre-Reading Activities:

Activity #1: Quickwrite

1. List all of the superheroes that you can think of.

2. What are some common traits that all of these superheroes have?

3. Why are superheroes so important in society?

4. In what ways are YOU a hero/heroic in your life?

5. As a senior in high school, how will you be the HERO to you own journey to your diploma? (Be specific- what exactly will you commit to this year to help you graduate?)

Activity #2: Background Investigation - Since *Beowulf* is part of Ancient English Literature, it is important to understand the historical time period and the originality of the text before reading the poem. Locate the historical information in your textbook on pages 12-18 (volume 1) and record 10 facts that help with understanding the background of this epic.

Record your 10 facts below (provide a parenthetical citation next your quoted/paraphrased fact):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Activity #3: Surveying the Text

1. The version of *Beowulf* we read is translated from Old-English, but it remains in poetic format. What prior experiences have you had reading poems? Do you enjoy reading poems? Why or Why not?

2. What do you notice about the text structure? How do you think this will affect your understanding of the story?

Reading Activities:

First Reading of Beowulf - Read pages 19-27 (volume 1). Stop when you have read "The Battle with Grendel."

Analyzing the Text

1. What is Herot?

2. What are your first impressions of Grendel?

3. What are you first impressions of Beowulf?

Continuing the first reading of Beowulf - Read pages 27-42 (volume 1)

1. What surprises you in the battle between Grendel and Beowulf? Why?

2. Grendel's mother is a major figure, but nothing is known about Grendel's father. In poem in which ancestry is important, what does Grendel's ancestry suggest about his character?

3. In what ways does Wiglaf resemble the younger Beowulf?

4. How does Beowulf finally meet his end? What does this tragic end say about the role of the hero?

5. How did the Geats offer Beowulf praise/glory following his death (they did several things- make note of all mentioned)?

Post-Reading Activities

Re-Reading Beowulf - As you reread the text of *Beowulf*, consider the questions below. When you are finished rereading, consider the themes, ideas and conflicts the text raises, then answer the questions below.

1. As a leader who personifies “heroism”, Beowulf is one of the earliest examples of a “hero” in English Literature. Choose a section of the poem which you this captures Beowulf’s heroism, either through a description of him or through a description of his actions. Write a one-paragraph response which speaks to Beowulf’s heroism and why his character continues to be used as an example of heroism in action.

2. Examine the nature of good & evil in the story. Where do these elements seem to conflict most?

Responding to the Text

1. Throughout the poem, Beowulf faces a series of enemies. From Grendel, to his mother, to the evil dragon, each of these monsters presents the hero with an intense challenge. Imagine that Beowulf was not killed at the end of the epic and create another challenge for him to face. Your response can be presented in paragraph form, a short comic, a picture and poem or any other mode that you feel adequately conveys the challenge you have created.